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ABSTRACT

Twelve languages, including the two prestigious colonial languages, English and French, a French-based creole, and "ancestral" languages such as Hindi and Mandarin are spoken on the multiethnic island Mauritius. Given the multilingual, multiethnic nature of the nation, linguistic practices are an important way for Mauritians to assert or construct their identity. The linguistic diversity of Mauritius has been considered in various censuses. The 2000 census questionnaire contained sections about "linguistic group," "language usually spoken in the home," and "literacy." In this paper, the 2000 census language tables related to "linguistic group" and "language usually spoken in the home" are discussed with reference to the current linguistic situation. The growing importance of Creole as both the language of the forefathers and the language usually spoken at home is discussed. The relatively important presence of English and French, and the decreasing everyday use of Asian languages, are highlighted. The final section of this paper suggests directions for further research on the language tables in the 2000 population census. (Contains 16 references.) (Author/SM)

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A DISCUSSION OF LANGUAGE TABLES FROM THE 2000 POPULATION CENSUS OF MAURITIUS

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A DISCUSSION OF LANGUAGE TABLES FROM THE 2000 POPULATION CENSUS OF MAURITIUS

Aaliya Rajah-Carrim (TAAL)

Abstract

Twelve languages – including the two prestigious colonial languages, English and French, a French-based creole and 'ancestral' languages, such as Hindi and Mandarin – are spoken on the multiethnic island Mauritius. Given the multilingual and multiethnic nature of the nation, linguistic practices are an important way for Mauritians to assert or construct their identities. The linguistic diversity of Mauritius has been considered in various censuses. The 2000 census questionnaire contained sections about 'linguistic group', 'language usually spoken in the home' and 'literacy'. In this paper, the 2000 census language tables related to 'linguistic group' and 'language usually spoken in the home' are discussed with reference to the current linguistic situation. The growing importance of Creole as both the language of the forefathers and the language usually spoken at home is discussed. The relatively important presence of English and French and the decreasing everyday use of Asian languages are highlighted. The final section of this paper suggests directions for further research on the language tables in the 2000 population census.

1. Introduction*

In multilingual countries like Mauritius, census data regarding languages do not and cannot provide a complete and accurate description of the national linguistic situation. However, census data combined with knowledge of language beliefs and behaviours of the population can give the researcher an interesting insight into the language situation of a country. In this paper, I discuss the general tendencies and unexpected trends found in some of the language tables from the 2000 Population census of Mauritius using my native knowledge of Mauritian culture as a background. The paper is structured as follows: in the first part, the historical, demographic and linguistic situations are described; the second and third sections discuss the language questions of the census questionnaire and the responses to these questions, respectively. In the fourth part of this paper, I analyse the general tendencies found in the census reports. Finally, I highlight issues raised by the discussions and suggest avenues for further research on the census reports.

1.1 Mauritius and its people

The island of Mauritius, situated in the Indian Ocean some 800 kilometres from Madagascar, has a multiethnic population of approximately 1.2 million inhabitants. The multiethnic and multilingual characteristics of the island are due to successive waves of immigration from the 18th till early 20th centuries. The island was uninhabited before its first settlement, from 1598 to 1710 by the Dutch. From 1720 to 1810, Mauritius was a French colony; during the French colonisation, slaves were brought from Africa and

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Asia. One of the languages spoken on the island at that time was a French-lexified creole, Mauritian Creole. In 1810, the British captured the island; although English replaced French as the language of administration and instruction, it was not as extensively used as French in everyday interactions (Stein 1997). Slavery was abolished under British rule and indentured labourers were brought from India; these labourers spoke a variety of languages, including Bhojpuri, Tamil, Telegu and Bengali. Bhojpuri was the most common language (Stein 1982). Traders from India and China also migrated to Mauritius in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries; the Indian traders spoke Gujerati or Kutchi (Hollup 1996) while the Chinese spoke Hakka or Cantonese (Stein 1982). By the middle of the 20th century, immigration became relatively rare in Mauritius. In 1968, Mauritius acquired independence, and in 1992 the country acceded to the status of Republic.

The ethnic composition of the population has not changed significantly since the end of immigration[1]. For official purposes, the population of Mauritius is divided into 4 groups: Hindus (52%), Muslims (17%), Sino-Mauritians (2%) and General Population (29%). The term *General Population* refers to the Coloured Population/Mulattos, Franco- and Afro-Mauritians.

The Indo-Mauritian group (Hindus and Muslims) makes up the largest segment of the population. The official Hindu group is further divided into Hindus (40%) and also Tamils (7%), Telegus (3%) and Marathis (2%). The Hindu/Tamil/Telegu/Marathi distinction is made on the basis of religious affiliations and ancestral languages (Eriksen 1998). The official category *Hindu* is therefore an umbrella-term for various other minority religious and linguistic groups. The Indo-Mauritian Muslim group consists of "Calcattias" (those whose ancestors came as labourers from Bihar), Surtees and Memans (Hollup 1996). These different Muslim groups identify with different ancestral languages, as shown in Figure 1 below.

The official term *General Population* is a cover-term which is not often used in daily interactions. The Afro-Mauritians are generally referred to as Creoles, where creole is usually characterised by a person's skin colour and also his use of Creole. Creole can also be used to refer to the mulattos who have dark skin. Some of the mulattos aspire to the French culture and way of life and do not want to be considered as Afro-Mauritians. Nonetheless, they are still generally rejected by the Franco-Mauritians. Because of their skin colour and their consistent use of the French language, the Franco-Mauritians form a distinct cultural and social group and are therefore not referred to as Creoles.

The Sino-Mauritians make up a small segment of the Mauritian population. It has been suggested that they have completely assimilated into the Mauritian lifestyle and have adopted Creole primarily (Stein 1986, Eriksen 1998).

Below is a diagram illustrating the linguistic affiliations of the various recognised ethnic/religious groups.

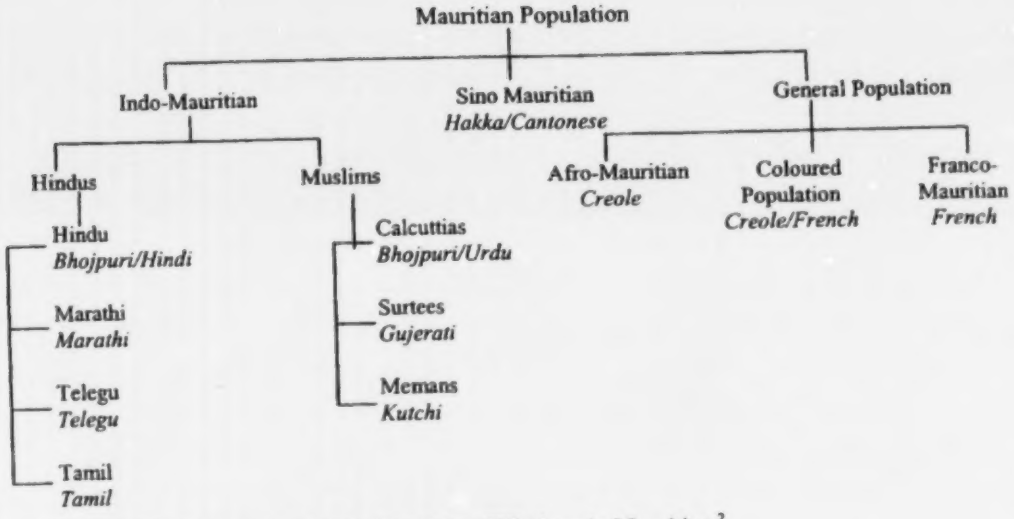

Figure 1.Ethnic groups and their linguistic affiliations in Mauritius.[2]

1.2 Linguistic situation

As Figure 1 suggests, each ethnic category is associated with at least one language. Most of the languages mentioned in Figure 1 are restricted to specific groups and are rarely used in daily interactions. It is claimed that Creole is the only language understood and spoken by all Mauritians (Stein 1986). However, Creole is stigmatised by some segments of the population because of its association with the economically and socially subordinate ethnic group, the *Creoles*.

French is, after Creole, the language most often used by Mauritians (Stein 1982). It is the native tongue of the Franco-Mauritians but has also become that of some Afro-, Sino- and Indo-Mauritians. Unlike Creole, French is taught at school. Creole and French are the two main inter-group languages. All the other languages in Figure 1 are restricted to in-group communication.

Bhojpuri differs from the other Asian languages in that it is the ancestral language of the descendants of both Hindu and Muslim indentured labourers. However, Bhojpuri is primarily an oral language and is considered as a patois in Mauritius (Stein 1986). It has been suggested that because of the stigma associated with Bhojpuri, and also its link with both Hindus and Muslims, the variety is not often claimed as an ancestral language (Moorghen & Domingue 1982). In order to be distinguished from each other, Hindus and Muslims claim Hindi and Urdu respectively, instead of Bhojpuri, as their ancestral languages (Stein 1986, Hollup 1996).

Missing in Figure 1 is the English language. English has been excluded from the above Figure because it is not associated with any ethnic group on the island. It is thought to be the only ethnically unmarked language in Mauritius (Eriksen 1998). Although English is the official language, the language of administration and instruction, it has never gained acceptance in Mauritian society as a language of everyday interaction. For most Mauritians, English is the language acquired at school (Stein 1997). Its use is restricted to formal domains. English and French are seen as prestigious languages indispensable to upward social mobility in Mauritius.

Languages in Mauritius can, therefore, broadly be classified into three groups: ancestral languages (Indian and Chinese languages) whose usage is limited, colonial languages (English and French) and language of everyday interactions (Creole).

2. Languages in the 2000 population census

The linguistic diversity of Mauritius was taken into consideration in the population censuses as early as 1931. The most recent population census was conducted in July 2000. The questionnaire for this census contained three sections related to languages:

1. *Linguistic group* (column 17) [3]

In this section, respondents were asked to state the language spoken by their ancestors. If the maternal and paternal ancestors spoke different languages, both were to be given.

2. *Language usually spoken* (column 18)

In this part of the questionnaire, interviewees were asked to state the language usually or most often spoken in their home.

3. *Languages read and written* (column 19)

The question for this section was as follows: 'In which language(s) can the person, with understanding, both read and write a simple statement in his/her everyday life?'

Respondents could put in any language as their ancestral language(s) and the language(s) most often used in the home; they were not given a list of specific languages to choose from. The following note was added at the end of each of the three sections: 'For census purposes, consider creole, bhojpuri etc as languages'.

In this paper, only responses to 'linguistic group' and 'language usually spoken' will be discussed. Also, 13.8% and 11.8% of the total population reported having two ancestral languages and using two languages at home, respectively, but it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss all the findings reported, so I will limit the discussions to reports of single languages only, even though this restriction entails the loss of some of the richness of the data.

The approach adopted in this paper is mainly synchronic in that the 2000 language tables are discussed with respect to the current linguistic situation and comparisons with previous censuses are rarely made. General tendencies are discussed and unexpected findings are highlighted.

2.1 Ambiguity of language questions

In the 1962, 1972 and 1983 censuses, there were two language questions. The first question referred to the 'language currently/usually spoken in the home', and the second one referred to 'mother tongue'/ 'language of forefathers'. Instructions for the second question made the link between language and ethnicity clear. The remarks were as follows:

> Column M – Languages. Mother Tongue – This is a very important question. It is intended to supplement Column E, "Ethnic Group", and to enable the Indo-Mauritian group to be subdivided.
>
> (as quoted in Stein 1986: 268)

In the 2000 census, the question relating to ancestral languages is entitled 'linguistic group' and shows no explicit connection to ethnic identity. Whether this question is still thought of as being tied to ethnicity will be discussed below.

If questions regarding ancestral languages seem to have become more objective, questions related to the language usually spoken at home have not been modified. Though the question targets only the 'language usually or most often spoken by the person in his/her home', reports of two languages were also recorded. However, even in the home environment, some Mauritians use more than two languages with family members. For instance, in an extended family home, a child may speak Creole with his/her parents, Bhojpuri with his/her grandparents and French with his/her siblings. Moreover, since this question is restricted to the family domain, it does not account for widespread multilingualism outside the home. Although the census question does not provide a complete and accurate picture of multilingualism within the Mauritian home, it shows that the language most often spoken in Mauritian homes is varied and can range from Creole to Urdu, for instance.

Finally, the explicit remark that Creole and Bhojpuri should be considered as languages in the census reflects current negative attitudes towards these languages and suggests that, in everyday life, some respondents do not consider these two varieties as fully-fledged languages. Given these negative attitudes, we might expect under-reporting for the use of Creole and Bhojpuri.

3. Findings

3.1 Linguistic group

Table 1 lists numbers of responses in column 17 of the census.

Languages	Number (Total = 1,143.069	%
Arabic	798	0.07
Bhojpuri	361,184	31.60
Chinese languages	22,606	1.98
Creole	420,344	36.78
English	1,073	0.09
French	21,090	1.85
Hindi	35,757	3.13
Marathi	16,587	1.45
Tamil	44,724	3.91
Telegu	18,793	1.64
Urdu	34,096	2.98
Other and not stated	166,017	14.52

Table1. Population by language of forefathers

More than 36% of the population report Creole as their ancestral language. We would expect only the Creoles and some Mulattos to report Creole as their ancestral language, Indo-and Sino-Mauritians to report Asian languages and Franco-Mauritians to claim French as their ancestral language (cf. Fig. 1). The Creoles and the Mulattos make up less than 29% of the total population. Yet 36.8% of the population claim that Creole is their ancestral language. Mauritians, other than creoles and mulattos, have therefore also reported Creole as their ancestral language.

Given that ancestral languages act as markers of ethnicity as discussed above, it seems that some Mauritians are (re-)negotiating their ethnic identity through language. Creole has supplanted the original ancestral language of these Mauritians. For example, a comparison between the 1983 and 2000 censuses shows a significant decrease in the reports of Indian languages (with the exception of Bhojpuri) as ancestral languages: from 65% to 47% (Stein 1986). It is possible that some of the remaining 18% have opted for Creole as their ancestral language. Unlike the Mauritians who still report Asian or European varieties as their ancestral languages, these Mauritians identify with a relatively recent past. Their ancestry is a couple of centuries old, while that of most Indo-, Sino- and Franco- Mauritians dates back to the pre-migration days. The data in Table 1 suggest that Creole is gaining acceptance as an ancestral language.

Moreover, Asian languages are still claimed as ancestral languages by a large segment of the Mauritian population. Given that Mauritians use languages as a means to construct and/or assert their ethnic identity, the relatively substantial presence of Indian languages (47%) in Table 1 is noteworthy. It is clear from the census reports that many Indo- and Sino-Mauritians generally see their history, at least their linguistic history, in terms of their Asian heritage. That is, many Indo- and Sino-Mauritians still strongly identify with Asian culture and languages.

The two prestigious colonial languages, English and French, are also reported as ancestral languages. 1.85% and 0.09% of the population claim French and English, respectively, as the language of their forefathers. Since French is associated with the Franco-Mauritians (Baggioni & Robillard 1990, Eriksen 1998), it is likely that most of the people who claim French as their ancestral language are from the Franco-Mauritian group. We can also expect members of the Coloured Population who have merged into the Franco-Mauritian group, or who aspire to do so, to have reported French as their ancestral language.

Furthermore, the small percentage of people who reported English as their ancestral language is to be expected. Relatively few British people settled on Mauritius (Toussaint 1972). Also, some of the British who stayed on the island assimilated to the French culture and way of life (Beaton 1859, Stein 1982).

The presence of Arabic in Table 1 is unexpected and needs to be explored. In his book *The Muslims of Mauritius*, Emrith (1967, as quoted in Eriksen 1998) makes no mention of Arabic. Yet, we find that 798 Mauritians claim that Arabic is their ancestral language. As a minority group, some Muslims feel threatened by the majority Hindus (Hollup 1996). Therefore, it is possible that by claiming that Arabic (instead of Bhojpuri) is their ancestral language, they are distancing themselves from the Indian subcontinent. Language is used by these Muslims as an ideological tool to assert themselves and distinguish themselves from the other Indo-Mauritian groups. Here, ancestry seems to be defined using religious rather than ethnic criteria[4].

These findings raise some interesting questions: after how many generations does a group change its allegiance to a given ancestral language (Eriksen 1998)? For instance, when will the Indo-Mauritian population identify itself more strongly with a Mauritian culture and history than with an Indian one? Does the language have to cease being spoken in the home?

3.2 Language usually or most often spoken in the home

3.2.1 Linguistic group vs language spoken in the home

Given the linguistic situation of Mauritius and language attitudes of Mauritians, the following tendencies would be expected:

1. An increase in reports of Creole as it is the language most extensively used by Mauritians;

2. A decrease in the mentions of Asian languages which are mostly associated with ethnicity and/or religion and are rarely used as tools of communication;

3. An increase in reports of French and English, the languages of upward social mobility.

3.2.2 Responses

Table 2 below summarises the findings for column 18. Table 3 shows the resident population by language of forefathers and language spoken at home.

Languages	Number (Total = 1,143,069)	%
Bhojpuri	142,385	12.46
Chinese languages	8,736	0.76
Creole	791,465	69.24
English	3,505	0.31
French	39,827	3.44
Hindi	7,245	0.63
Marathi	1,888	0.17
Tamil	3,622	0.32
Telegu	2,169	0.19
Urdu	1,789	0.16
Other and not stated	140,438	12.29

Table 2. Population by language spoken at home

Language of forefathers	Total	Language usually spoken at home										
	1,143,069	Bhojpuri	Chinese languages	Creole	English	French	Hindi	Marathi	Tamil	Telegu	Urdu	Other and N. stated
		142,385	8,736	791,465	3,505	39,827	7,245	1,888	3,622	2,169	1,789	140,438
Arabic	798	2	-	636	5	20	-	-	-	-	26	109
Bhojpuri	361,184	126,700	34	187,074	349	1,137	2,605	9	19	21	134	43,102
Chinese languages	22,606	2	8,430	11,005	125	899	-	-	-	-	-	2,145
Creole	420,344	547	100	389,523	393	10,428	56	5	22	8	61	19,201
English	1,073	-	1	88	746	119	7	-	2	-	-	110
French	21,090	4	4	1,437	151	17,837	2	-	2	-	-	1,653
Hindi	35,757	5,082	7	20,945	280	511	3,465	8	3	4	2	5,450
Marathi	16,587	184	-	12,778	40	82	8	1,778	-	-	-	1,717
Tamil	44,724	117	6	36,639	137	546	11	1	3,442	2	-	3,823
Telegu	18,793	241	-	13,170	32	199	9	2	5	2,065	-	3,070
Urdu	34,096	302	7	29,325	185	381	50	-	-	-	1,356	2,490
Other and not stated	166,017	9,204	147	88,845	1,062	7,668	1,032	85	127	69	210	57,568

Table 3. Population by language of forefather and language spoken at home

A comparison between Tables 1 and 2 shows a significant increase for Creole. While only a third of the population report Creole as their ancestral language, more than two thirds claim that Creole is the language that they usually speak at home. Even though the number of Mauritians who report using Creole at home is high, it is still not an accurate representation of the number of Creole speakers at home. It has been observed by linguists and some members of the general public that around 80% of the children who join nursery school have mostly been exposed to Creole (Ah Nee 2002, Virahsawmy 2002). This implies that in more than three-quarters of Mauritian homes, Creole is the language most often spoken. The reported 69% of the census is, therefore, an underestimate of the actual extensive use of Creole in the home. This perceived under-reporting could be due to the fact that reports of two languages have been excluded in this study (cf. Section 2).

92.7% of the people who report Creole as their ancestral language use it in their home. 2.5% usually speak French at home. Using French in the home suggests an improvement in social status. It is possible that the people who claim Creole as their ancestral language and French as the language usually spoken are part of the Coloured Population. These people do not reject their creole ancestry – as suggested by their

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report of Creole as ancestral language – but, at the same time, aspire to a movement up the social ladder.

Upward social mobility is also suggested in the responses of people who report Creole as their ancestral language and English as the language of the home. These 393 respondents report that their ancestors used Creole but that they now speak English. The use of English suggests a high level of education and consequently, a middle-class or upper-class status.

The use of Asian languages by those who claim Creole as their ancestral language is unexpected. Since Asian languages are mostly markers of identity and rarely used in everyday interactions, it is difficult to explain their presence in cases where Creole is reported as the ancestral language. The reverse would be expected.

It is indeed the case that where Asian languages are reported as ancestral languages, Creole becomes the language usually spoken at home. In these cases, the Asian languages clearly function as markers of ethnicity and Creole as a commonly spoken language. Asian languages are used in a limited number of households, with each of these households speaking mostly its own reported ancestral Asian language.

Bhojpuri differs from the other Asian languages in that it is usually spoken in the home by more than 10% of the total population. Most of the people who usually/most often speak Bhojpuri at home claim to have an Asian variety as their ancestral language. However, almost 50% of those who indicate that Bhojpuri is their ancestral language usually speak Creole at home. It has been claimed that Creole is taking over domains where Bhojpuri and other ancestral languages were used, e.g., the home (Stein 1982). This is confirmed in the 2000 census figures.

Furthermore, Creole and Bhojpuri are thought to be in a diglossic situation where Creole is the High variety and Bhojpuri is the Low one (Chaudenson 1989). Although Table 2 does not confirm this observation, it shows that Bhojpuri has become more of an emblem of ancestry than a language of everyday interaction. Creole is clearly in an opposite situation: it is used by more than 69% at home while it is the ancestral language of only 39.8% of the population.

Some general tendencies can be found and predictions made from the above figures. In the next section, the tendencies and predictions are discussed.

4. Tendencies and predictions

Tables 1 and 2 show that the Asian languages in Mauritius function mainly as ancestral languages. The ancestral languages, with the exception of Bhojpuri, are used by a small segment of the population in the home. Since ancestral languages function mainly as in-group languages, their use is very limited outside the home. It can, therefore, be predicted that Asian languages will soon function exclusively as symbols of culture, personal history and/or religion rather than spoken languages in Mauritius. It is difficult to predict whether even their status as ancestral languages will be taken over by Creole, French or English. Those who report using ancestral languages in the home could do so for ideological purposes. Language issues are charged with cultural and political meaning in Mauritius (Miles 2000). Minority groups may feel that by reporting the use

of their ancestral language in the home, they are asserting themselves and preserving their culture.

French and English are acquiring a new dimension as languages of the home. This is to be expected as these are the languages of upward social mobility. French is the native tongue of the Franco-Mauritians but, as Table 3 suggests, has also become that of some Afro-, Sino- and Indo-Mauritians. Since French is widely used in the school system, an increasing number of parents are using this language at home so that their children can be exposed to it from a very early age (Baggioni & Robillard 1990).

English is a neutral language in that it is not associated with any ethnic or religious group on the island (section 1.3). The literature suggests that the use of English is restricted to formal domains. However, the census reports show that 0.3% of the population do speak English in the home. More people claim to use English in the home than to have it as their ancestral language. Access to English is mostly through the school system and mastery of English only comes after completion of college. The people who speak English at home must, therefore, have had access to at least secondary schooling. It seems reasonable to claim that some parents choose to speak English at home so that their children can acquire the language from a very early age and hence have a headstart at school – as has been observed for French.

The high figures for Creole in the census tables are interesting. Even though its use is thought to be under-reported (69% in the census tables in comparison with the observed 80% by Ah Nee 2002 and Virahsawmy 2002), its position as the language most often used in the home cannot be challenged by any of the other languages. Since Creole is taking over a domain where ancestral languages used to be spoken, it is no longer competing with the latter as the language of the home but with English and French. Like French, therefore, Creole is acquiring a new dimension in addition to its role as a marker of ethnicity.

Furthermore, all these trends suggest changes in language attitudes, especially attitudes to Creole and Bhojpuri. It has been argued that Bhojpuri "is widely spoken in Mauritius but is not claimed as a cultural indicator" (Moorghen & Domingue 1982: 54). The significant presence of Bhojpuri in Table 1 shows that for many Mauritians, Bhojpuri functions as an ancestral language. In fact, the 2000 census Figures (Tables 1 and 2) depict Bhojpuri more as a cultural indicator than as a vernacular language extensively used in everyday interactions. That is, more people report having Bhojpuri as an ancestral language than actually using it at home.

Also, Creole is transcending ethnic and social barriers and is used by people of various ethnic and social backgrounds. A respondent's ethnicity and religion can partly be deduced on the basis of his/ her ancestral language. Table 3 clearly indicates that everyday use of Creole is not restricted to specific groups and it is used by people who claim to have European and Asian varieties as their ancestral languages. This tendency suggests that Creole is gaining acceptance as the language of everyday interactions in the Mauritian home. Mauritians, therefore, seem to have accepted Creole, and also Bhojpuri, as fully fledged languages, and come to terms with the idea that these two languages can act as markers of ethnicity, be used in the home and be reported as being used. This acknowledgement enhances the status of these two varieties as "this is not just de facto acceptance, but rather acceptance in the minds of the speaker as well" (Stein 1986: 268).

However, that Creole is accepted in the home does not mean that it can be recognised as a national language. It still tends to be perceived as a marker of Creole identity and culture (Eriksen 1998). Interestingly, therefore, Mauritians admit to using Creole in their home, but might not be ready to see its use institutionalised. We can, therefore, expect attitudes towards Creole to differ with respect to domains of use.

Finally, the census figures show a clear awareness of the differences between ancestral language and language usually/most often used at home. Mauritians are conscious of their cultural past and language is an important way for them to assert their ethnic identity in this multiethnic nation. Also, they still seem to relate the question about ancestral language to their ethnic origins. Whereas some years ago the language of forefathers coincided with the language used at home (Stein 1982), nowadays the language of forefathers and language used at home can be distinguished in most cases. For instance, Asian languages are mainly 'language of forefathers' while Creole is mostly the 'language usually spoken at home'.

5. Further research

In the above paragraphs, only the general tendencies and unexpected findings observed in the language tables are discussed. Many variables, such as gender, level of education, place of residence and literacy, can help to account for these tendencies and influence responses to questions regarding 'linguistic group' and 'language usually spoken'. The effect of these variables needs to be investigated so that a better understanding of the linguistic situation in Mauritius can be obtained.

Finally, to understand how language attitudes are changing in Mauritius, current trends found in the 2000 population census have to be compared with previous censuses. For example, an increase in reports of Creole as the language of forefathers and language usually spoken at home can be observed from the 1983 and 2000 censuses: from 29% to 36.8% for the language of forefathers and from 54% to 69.2% for language usually spoken. Also, while in 1972 and 1983 0.3% and 0.2% of the population, respectively, claimed that English was their ancestral language, only 0.09% of the population did so in 2000. However, more people claimed to use English in the home in 2000 than in 1972 and 1983. How do these figures relate to ongoing language change in Mauritius? Do they reflect a change in language attitudes? How have such changes affected national language policies? A comparative analysis of these figures can provide answers to such questions and also give us an interesting insight into linguistic change in this creole-speaking nation.

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Notes

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[1] In Mauritius, ethnicity is associated with "family origins, language, religion, physical appearance (phenotype) and/or lifestyle" (Eriksen 1998: 49).

[2] Key: In italics are the languages associated with the respective ethnic/religious group, i.e., the ancestral language of each group.

[3] Figures for the language Tables and a specimen questionnaire were obtained from the *Central Statistical Office* website. Columns 17–19 refer to the numbering system found on the questionnaire.

[4] Had these Mauritians asserted their identity along ethnic criteria, they would probably have quoted Bhojpuri or Urdu as their ancestral language(s). Arabic, unlike Bhojpuri and Urdu, has no direct link with the cultural and ethnic origins of the Mauritian Muslims. To the Mauritian Muslim, Arabic is only the language of the Quran and of obligatory prayer, that is, a language that can enable them to define their religious identity.

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